



Lewistown Infirmary

Background:

The Department of Corrections has identified a population of older offenders with chronic medical conditions that require a level of care, which has become increasingly challenging to provide in a traditional prison environment. The population is low-security offenders with an array of serious physical infirmities. About half are in wheelchairs, many are confined to a bed, need help walking or require constant attention to prevent falls. Many also are sight- or hearing-impaired and have multiple, chronic medical issues such as dementia, heart disease, diabetes, pulmonary disease and cancer. The department asked for and received from the 2011 Legislature funding for a facility capable of providing the care necessary for this population. Managing these offenders in a dedicated facility will ensure they receive the appropriate level of medical care in a setting designed and staffed for that purpose. The need for such a facility has been discussed and identified as a critical need in the corrections system for well over a decade.

Highlights:

1. A wing adjoining the Montana Mental Health Nursing Care Center in Lewistown will be used to house 25 people with serious physical infirmities.
2. The program is a partnership between two state agencies: the Department of Corrections and Department of Public Health and Human Services.
3. The two departments will jointly staff and operate the program, under an agreement between both agencies. The designated wing of the facility will undergo safety and security enhancements.
4. The facility will be a state-licensed infirmary.
5. The program will have about 34 employees including a nursing staff of 21 and eight safety officers, with projected annual pay and benefits of \$1.7 million. The total economic benefit of this to the Lewistown/Fergus County area will be \$2.36 million annually, according to a Department of Labor and Industry calculation.
6. The wing will be closed off from the existing care center and the two programs will operate with separate direct-care staffs. The corrections residents housed in the secure wing will not have access to other portions of the care center or their patients and cannot move outside the building without direct supervision. The care center will provide support services, such

as food and laundry. Ron Balas, the long-time superintendent of the care center, and a Department of Corrections program manager will collaboratively oversee the new program.

7. Input will be sought from the dedicated and professional staff at the existing care center prior to opening of the new unit. The staff's vast amount of experience and training will be invaluable to the success of the newly hired staff operating the new unit.
8. Building improvements for this project will cost an estimated \$700,000. The Legislature authorized improvements to the center.
9. Safety features will include an eight-foot fence, detection devices and security enhancements to windows and doors.
10. Safety and security staff will be provided by the Department of Corrections.
11. A Lewistown-based probation and parole officer will be available to assist the staff.
12. DPHHS operates the existing care center, which includes secure units. It has a staff of 145, a capacity of 100 and an average population of 83. Most of the patients come from Montana State Hospital or are patients for which private nursing homes are unable to provide care.

Timeline (approximate):

July 1 – Renovation contractor hired

July 15 – Renovation work begins

Oct. 1 – Staff recruitment begins

Dec. 1 – Renovation work completed

Dec. 15 – Program begins operating

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